

Voorburg Group on Service Statistics 15th meeting (Madrid, 18-22 09 00)

Progress report Belgium

Introduction

This is the first meeting of the Voorburg group Belgium has attended. The Belgian representative, Marc Debusschere, comes from the area of short-term statistics, and the main areas of interest were price statistics in the services, product classifications of services and information society indicators. The first two topics interest us from a very practical point of view: a pilot project of collecting price information using a computer-assisted call center is under way at present.

Below a short outline of the different institutions in Belgium which are involved in services statistics, and a brief review of recent progress, projects under way and plans for the near future.

Institutional backgrounds

As in most if not all countries, presumably, services are not covered by one single agency in Belgium. The main institutions and units involved are:

- Statistics Belgium
 - Structural Business Survey Division
 - Short Term Indicators Unit
 - Trade and Transport Division
 - Tourism Unit
- National Bank of Belgium
 - National Accounts
 - Foreign Trade
 - Business Opinion Surveys
- Price Indices Service (Ministry of Economy)

Attending a Voorburg Group meeting thus requires a lot of coordination and fact-finding, before and after.

Recent progress and projects

- Structural Business Survey

Implementation of the EU Regulation in the past years has resulted in greatly increasing the availability of structural data in the services sectors.

 - The results 1998 were transmitted to EUROSTAT some weeks ago.
 - The survey on business services statistics of the NSI Belgium covers a lot more in terms of NACE and variables than asked for by the Regulation.
 - The information collected through the survey will be analysed related to the following topics :
 - the sectors of social economy
 - trade
 - globalisation
 - flexibility in employment
 - ITC

Contact: jeanmarie.dawagne@statbel.mineco.fgov.be
- Tourism

An initiative is under way to bring together all parties involved in Belgium which should result, hopefully in the beginning of 2001, in a new integrated compilation of tourism statistics.

Contact: annie.versonnen@statbel.mineco.fgov.be
- Information society

Within Statistics Belgium a new Unit was created to coordinate data in this area. The philosophy, at least in this stage, is one of creating a new entry to existing data rather than starting additional data collections.

Contact: diane.provoost@statbel.mineco.fgov.be

- Compliance with EU Regulation 1165/98 on short-term statistics
Annexes C (Retail trade and repair) and D (Other services) of the Regulation apply to services. They prescribe the compilation of data on turnover, persons employed and, only for annex C, the deflator (or volume) of sales. Belgium is not yet able to provide these variables with all required characteristics, but projects to do so shortly are running, mainly by using administrative sources.
Contact: marc.debusschere@statbel.mineco.fgov.be
- Other short term indicators
Apart from the indicators required by the EU Regulation, Belgium has developed some additional monthly short-term indicators, which also cover services: bankruptcies (contact: frank.verschaeren@statbel.mineco.fgov.be) and investment indices (contact: jeanpierre.rampel@statbel.mineco.fgov.be)
- Output price indices in services
As a result of the development of an index of material costs in construction, which also involves services as inputs, a survey collecting price evolutions for these services is being put into place. The survey uses state-of-the-art computer-assisted telephone interviewing, the CATI module of the Statistics Netherlands Blaise software.
Contact: jeanpierre.ntwa@statbel.mineco.fgov.be
- Business opinion survey
In September 2000 the National Bank of Belgium has extended its business opinion surveys on producer confidence into the area of services to enterprises (covering 'transport', 'IT', 'renting' and 'other services to enterprises'). There are plans for 2001 to further extend into business-to-consumer services, hotels and restaurants, and tourism.
Contact: business.surveys@nbb.be

Conclusions

In recent years services statistics have progressed noticeably in Belgium, in both the structural and the short-term areas. It seems likely this will continue in the years to come, taking into account the number of new initiatives planned or already being implemented.